



# Tontitown Storia

Newsletter of the Tontitown Historical Museum (THM)

A Department of the City of Tontitown

Spring 2023, Vol. 18, No. 1



Ciao from the Tontitown Historical Museum board members! We have exciting news to share with you: Our team is growing! We have added a second Museum Assistant to our staff. We are honored to announce that former Secretary of the Board, Emily Pianalto-Beshears, has been selected to fill this role. As Museum Assistant Emily will provide the Museum with a greater capacity to serve the community and preserve Tontitown's history. This will also give us the opportunity to increase our hours of operation. Starting in June we will be open from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM every Wednesday, in addition to our hours listed on page 11.

As 2022 drew to a close we celebrated another year of wonderful Tontitown community events. In August we were delighted to provide our museum experience to the attendees of the 123rd Tontitown Grape Festival as they enjoyed the festivities. In October we hosted the 20th Annual Tontitown Reunion & Old-Fashioned Polenta Smear. It was a privilege to bring the community together, celebrate our history, and enjoy delicious Italian dishes. Thank you to everyone who brought along photos and documents for us to scan and include in our collection! On Sunday, May 21st, join us for another of our community events – Tontitown Heritage Day! See details inside.

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## Mama Z's, A Family Tradition

by Emily Pianalto-Beshears, Museum Assistant

In 1988 when Edna Zulpo and her daughter Lisa Neil opened Mama Z's for business, they never expected the rush that would come through those doors the first couple days. Lisa spoke of those first days when I sat down with Lisa and her daughter Jessie Bishop, the newest co-owner of Mama Z's. Edna had worked for Willis Shaw up to the opening of the restaurant. Her co-workers were some of the first in the door along with the rush of local people wanting good home-cooked Italian meals. The crowd was so overwhelming that Lisa was unsure how they were going to keep up with the masses. With the help of other locals who were in the restaurant business, like Vince Pianalto and Jake Jaro, as well as Edna's old co-workers who had jumped in to bus tables and help the small staff that first week, the mother-daughter duo was able to not only keep but thrive.

Business never slowed down from that first week. While both women had worked through the years at other local establishments neither one had ever owned or run their own business. There seems to have been few bumps in the road on their success. Expansion was necessary almost immediately. Lisa recalled that they added on the additional seating and pasta making room in 1991/1992 (previously they had been making pasta down an aisle between tables). Eager patrons were ready to fill the seats and tell their friends to join. Mama Z's was recently voted as one of the top five of The South's Best of 2023 Local Restaurants by *Southern Living* magazine. With publicity like this it's no wonder there is a line at the door and stacks of to-go orders daily.



Top photo: Edna's prized family recipes  
Bottom photo: Toddler Jessie Neil helps in the kitchen, 1993  
*Photos courtesy Edna Morsani Zulpo family*

While talking with Jessie about her new role as co-owner, I asked Jessie what her motivation was in taking ownership of the restaurant. Jessie reminisced growing up in the kitchen, learning to make biscuits and pasta with her Nona Edna, and helping her

Aunt Julie when the business was under her ownership. Even at a young age Jessie recalled that she wanted to own Mama Z's one day when she was older, a dream she has now accomplished as the third-generation owner. She recalled working with her family and her friends during night shifts after school, having fun, and learning what made this restaurant great. Jessie is hopeful the tradition won't end with her and will be passed on to her own children when they are old enough. As of now, you can visit them some nights when they are at Mama Z's keeping an eye on business and supporting their mom in her dream.

As the next generation takes over ownership be assured that the tried-and-true dishes that have made Mama Z's a staple for those visiting Northwest Arkansas will remain intact. In honoring the menu her Nona Edna created using recipes from her mother Vivian Haney Morsani and grandmother Virginia Morsani, Jessie honors the heritage of Tontitown. The dishes that would have been found on every table in the 1930s are still made the same in their kitchen today. When asked what their favorite dishes were, the answer is unsurprising: Mama's Spaghetti & Fried Chicken – the dish that brings people to the area during the Tontitown Grape Festival can be found daily Tuesday-Saturday at Mama Z's.

While times are changing in our area, there is one assurance that the recipes of our ancestors will continue to live on. Jessie mentioned requests from out of town for Mama Z's homemade pasta and sauce, even shipping as far as Las Vegas recently, to bring a taste of Tontitown to their homes. If you have not been to Mama Z's, or if it has been a few years, take the time to stop by or order food to-go and enjoy a little taste of Italy from this wonderful family!



**Tontitown: From Farm to Market** – Museum event in Harry Sbanotto Park – May 22, 2005

L-R, Sitting: grandson Bradley Bowling, daughter Julie Zulpo Bowling, "Mama Z" Edna Morsani Zulpo

L-R, Standing: grandson Josh Neil, daughter Lisa Zulpo Neil, granddaughter Jessie Neil, daughter Yvonne Zulpo Otwell  
*Photo by Brenda Pinalto*



**Mama Z's new co-owners, 2023**  
 Jessie and Jesse Bishop

with daughter Kennedy and son Ryder  
*Photo by Kristi Rachelle Photography*



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# Learn How to Make ...Beef Braciole (Involtini)

by Vince Pianalto

**Serves 8**   **Prep time: 25 min.**   **Cook time: 1 hr.**

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 28-ounce cans of San Marzano tomatoes
- 2-pound beef top sirloin roast
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup pine nuts
- 4 finely minced cloves garlic
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- sea salt and cracked pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup white wine



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add the tomatoes to a blender and blend on medium speed until smooth. Transfer to a medium-size pot, season with salt and pepper, and cook on low heat.
2. Next, slice the sirloin roast into 12 thin fillets and pound each of them out on a cutting board in between plastic wrap or a plastic bag until it is about 1/4 thick. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.
3. In a medium-size bowl, mix together bread crumbs, cheese, parsley, garlic, pine nuts, 3 tablespoons olive oil and salt and pepper until combined.
4. Add a small amount of the bread crumb mixture to the center of 1 pounded beef fillet and spread it out across the beef fillet pressing it down into the beef. Roll up the beef to make a roulade.
5. Repeat until the beef and stuffing has all been used and truss each beef roulade with butcher's twine or a toothpick.
6. Next, add 2 tablespoons olive oil to a large pan over medium-high heat and sear the beef on all sides until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes per side.
7. Add in white wine and cook for 2-3 minutes.
8. Pour in the tomato sauce, add a lid to the pan and cook over low heat for 1 hour.
9. Remove the butchers twine, slice, and serve. I like to serve with polenta, but a pasta would be excellent too!



*I have very fond memories of Grandma [Esther Pianalto] cooking this dish. Mangiamo!*

- Vince Pianalto

Above photo, Visiting cousins in Vicenza, Italy, 2022. L-R: Silvia Balestrin, Marty Harmon, Wanda Pianalto, Vince Pianalto, Elena Freschi and Anna Freschi.

Color photos courtesy Vince Pianalto.

Left photo: Grandmother Esther Marendo Pianalto holding son John and grandfather Gile Pianalto holding son Joe.

Tontitown Historical Museum collection, S-2006-183-17.



Photo by Danielle DeLille



Photo by Brenda Pianto

# Tontitown Heritage Day

Sunday | May 21, 2023 Noon to 2:00PM

Arthur Penzo Pavilion in Harry Sbanotto Park

235 E Henri de Tonti Blvd.

Join us for a fun-filled afternoon in the park!

- Live Music by Michael Pianto
- Kids Scavenger Hunt in the park
- Lawn Bocce, Jenga, and Corn Hole
- Hot Dog Lunch with Ranalli's Cookies  
(suggested \$5 donation, unless an Amici member)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Baked Goods Silent Auction
- Raffle Basket: "A Celebration of Pasta" featuring pasta from local restaurants and makers
- And a NEW display inside the Tontitown Historical Museum



Hosted by Tontitown Historical Museum  
Supporting Division of Arkansas Heritage

**Thank you to our sponsor!**  
**Tontitown Winery**



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## Interview with Foreign Exchange Student Federico Boschi

The Tontitown Historical Museum has been honored to get to know and hear of the experiences of foreign exchange student Federico Boschi, who has been staying with the family of David and Heather Ranalli Peachee (owners of the Tontitown Winery) since last fall. With his stay in Tontitown coming to a close, we asked for a small interview about his time here in Tontitown.

### **Tell us about your family.**

My family is composed of 5 people: my dad, my mom, me, my sister, and my dog. My Dad's name is Massimiliano, my mom is Camilla, my sister is Arianna, and my dog is

Stanton. One particular thing about my family is my dad's business. He runs a Prosciutto factory. My grandad started it in the early 70's, then after he died he passed it to my Dad. It's called Prosciuttificio Mario Boschi & Figlio. Me and my dad are really proud of that business. I would like to do something that connects my future work with my Prosciuttificio. We have the best prosciutto ever. If you come to Italy, you have to come visit me. My Dad will give you a tour.

### **What area are you from? What is the area known for?**

Parma, Italy. It's the capital of food and culture in Italy. There is a lot of history in Parma.

### **Is there a signature dish for the area?**

It's where they make prosciutto, parmesano, torta fritta, and all kinds of different salami.

### **What is your favorite treat you can only find in Italy?**

Real Gelato

### **What made you interested in doing a study abroad in America?**

To learn one of the most important languages in the world. To use it in my future jobs. I was also really interested in the high-school life and sports. It felt like the schools in Italy were getting smaller and boring.

### **Are there any new hobbies you've discovered in America?**

Hanging out with friends at Top Golf. Riding in a car as teenagers, at home we have to be 18 years old to drive. At home, I drive a scooter.

### **What hobbies do you miss from Italy?**

Going to the club and hanging out with my friends on the square and in Parma.

### **What was the hardest transition for you in coming to America?**

I don't have the freedom that I have at home. School here is longer days, but we don't go on Saturday.



While traveling with the Peachee's, Federico saw the perfect sign – Love Italian Style – at the Sandhill Curiosity Shop on Route 66!

*Photo by Heather Ranalli Peachee, November 21, 2022*

**What have you discovered in America that you will take home and teach or share with friends/family?**

I am more open-minded, and I understand and accept other cultures and languages. I will teach my friends and family to try everything that you can and don't waste opportunities.

**What other places in America would you like to visit?**

San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, Las Vegas. But I have been able to visit several states while I've been here including, Oklahoma, Missouri, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Atlanta, and I was also able to go to Mexico. We are hoping to make it to Illinois before I leave.

**Has your stay here changed any of your life goals or perspectives on life?**

I didn't really have any plans when I came here but since January, I started thinking about my future. About getting a car and continuing playing basketball. Working with my Dad in our Prosciuttificio to earn money to pay for my future car and college.

**Would you visit again?**

Yes, for sure.

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## Board Member Spotlight

With Dax Peachee, Junior Member

- **What is your hometown?**
  - Tontitown, Arkansas
- **How long have you been living in Northwest Arkansas?**
  - All my life, 17 years
- **What is your role at the Tontitown Historical Museum?**
  - Junior Board Member
- **What are your hobbies?**
  - Farming, video games, skating, and playing the guitar (though I don't get to play as much as I did in the good ol' days). I swim for HarBer High School and am very involved in FFA. I also enjoy helping at my family's winery.
- **What makes you the happiest?**
  - Helping people and working in the greenhouse.
- **What made you interested in getting involved in the THM?**
  - I want to be involved in the community and I like antique items.
- **What aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?**
  - Seeing the new artifacts that we are putting into the collection and helping with organizing museum events.
- **In three words/phrases, how would you describe the mission and work of THM?**
  - Preservation, Representation, Pride



L-R: Grandfather Chris Ranalli & Dax Peachee  
Tontitown Farmer's Market – Summer 2022  
*Photo by Heather Ranalli Peachee*



Thank you, Amici members, for your 2023 (marked with an asterisk ) and 2022 memberships! Your support means the world to us and helps us continue to preserve our history. A membership form to renew your membership or to become a new member is at the end of this newsletter. ***Grazie Mille, Amici!***

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Family of Frank & Evelyn Maestri\*  
 Family of Joe & Theresa Moore\*

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## ~ Donations in Memory and in Honor ~

*It is with gratitude and pride that we display Memorial and Honorarium (H)  
donation plaques in the Tontitown Historical Museum.*

Beato & Violet Haney Ardemagni	Albano & Agnes Pierce Maestri
Cathy Ardemagni	Frank Maestri
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Gene & Irma Taldo Ardemagni	Paul & Judy Maestri's 50th Anniversary
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Lee Wana Keck	Nova Jean Fiori Watson
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	Leon & Sally Verucchi Zulpo

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## Tontitown Historical Museum Board Members, 2023

*Tontitown Storia* is published by the Tontitown Historical Museum Board. Please submit story ideas or comments to Ethan Oxford at [museum@tontitownar.gov](mailto:museum@tontitownar.gov).

Misty Piazza, President  
Jennifer De Martino, Vice President  
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Riley Tessaro  
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**Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday 1:00 – 4:00 pm  
Starting June, open Wednesday 9:00 am – 1:00 pm  
Call or email to schedule a special visit.**

**Contact us:**  
**(479) 361-9800**  
**[museum@tontitownar.gov](mailto:museum@tontitownar.gov)**

**251 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard**  
**P.O. Box 144**  
**Tontitown, AR 72770**

### 2023 Museum and Community Events

Date	Event
August 1-5	124 <sup>th</sup> Tontitown Grape Festival
Saturday, September 16	Tontitown Annual Car & Truck Show – Bocce Tournament & Pickleball Tournament
Tuesday, October 31	Tontitown Halloween in the Park
Sunday, November 5	21st Annual Tontitown Reunion and Old- Fashioned Polenta Smear





251 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard  
P.O. Box 144  
Tontitown, Arkansas 72770



*"So Big,  
This Little  
Museum"*

**Benefits**

- Satisfaction in supporting the growth of the Tontitown Historical Museum to preserve and protect the heritage of Tontitown.
- 10% discount on Museum purchases
- Free admission to Museum events

**Mail your tax-deductible check to:**

Tontitown Historical Museum  
P.O. Box 144  
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*(or give to any Museum Board member)*

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- Individual – \$15
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**Volunteers are the backbone of Tontitown Historical Museum. May we call on you to volunteer?  Yes!**